

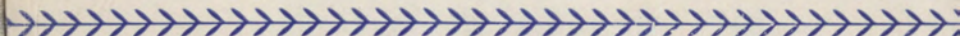
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Reporter

LETTERS

from

CHINA



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LETTERS FROM CHINA

Written by
A seventeen year old girl
Her Chinese father
Her American mother
An American woman in Shanghai
An English woman in Peking

Telling about—

The way they live

School life

New department stores

National Day

Rationing

Cooperatives

Joint state-private ownership

FOREWORD

I have enjoyed so much the letters that came to us from China, and have learned so much from them that we passed them around among ourselves. Now we think you also should have an opportunity to enjoy them and to learn from them about the way people are living in that great country. The transplanted family, the father returning to his native land after an absence of twenty-five years, his American wife and their daughter, born in the United States and attending a well-known New England school before she went with her parents to China, the energetic English woman who has been in Peking only three or four years but knows how to use her eyes, the American woman in Shanghai quietly comparing what she now sees with what she saw through the twenty years earlier in the country when she lived there before: each adds to the picture that develops as we read.

Maud Russell

*from the seventeen year old daughter
of a Chinese father and an American mother
September, 1954*

Tells of Changes In Herself After Ten Months in Peking

I imagine that you want to hear most about my life here and my impressions of New China, etc. I may as well start from the beginning since I have not written a word since I got here. We arrived in Peking by train in December and from that point our new life began. I guess you can imagine that life here is entirely different from that back home. Since this letter is to give you an honest account of my experiences and observations here and not designed to "sound good", I might as well tell you that it has not been an easy time at all, partly because of my complete lack of any preparation or understanding beforehand.

During the trip I felt a complete mixed mess of impatience, fear, complete skepticism, and an expectation of a sort of Socialist Utopia. At any rate, no matter what I expected to, or was afraid to find, as soon as I got here I was anxious to start school and find out what was really the truth. It is very interesting to compare what I did find and what I expected to find.

Since no one ever told me otherwise, I just took it for granted that Peking was just about like New York, with skyscrapers and refrigerators in every house, etc. I imagined the School for Overseas Chinese as a sort of small private establishment, with practically private tutoring, a class for every different language speaking people, lots of Chinese children from America and England, and all that. In short I had what you would call a fairly American attitude toward it all. Anyway, when I got here, and especially when I started school, I got a terrific shock.

I guess you know how easy it is to see a surface picture and not understand the background and the reasons behind it and get an entirely wrong idea, but entirely. I don't think

that there was a thing I saw here that I didn't misunderstand completely. This was probably due to conditions the way they were, especially since I got in a room of backward elements, or misled elements, or whatever you want to call them. Knowing nothing and being very eager to know something, I soaked up everything they said. (There was a girl in the room from the Philippines who spoke English and did all the translating for me, me not knowing a word of Chinese at the time.)

The things they told me, although not being actually untrue, were only one side of the picture. Fortunately I had expected to find rather inadequate material conditions, so that was not hard for me to adjust to. Anyway, I did not mind if life was not so comfortable, since that was not what I came for. The hardest thing for me to adjust to has been 1) if you know what I mean by "politically developed area"; I expected China to be nothing but a large one, with everybody understanding everything, and people ready to pop around the corner anytime you didn't understand anything to explain it to you in great detail, all very accurate of course. I didn't know that if anything new is to grow out of the old, it must start from the old and grow gradually. Anyway, there is no such thing as a completely developed area "politically". People are people, and must grow and change slowly with conditions, and this process never ends, and there are always some that are behind the others. I happened to fall into a relatively undeveloped area, where such things as hypocrisy and opportunism and bureaucracy still exist, and imagined all of China to be exactly like this. 2) It was very hard for me, as it would be for anybody, to understand what people's lives have in relationship to society and to each other under a completely different way of life from the one you just came from.

There are some things in your thinking that you just have to throw away completely, and also some essentially good parts which don't have to be changed, but it is very difficult

to know just which ones are good and which ones are mistaken. Also, it is not as easy to change your thinking as it is to empty a waste paper basket and stuff it completely with new things. Everything has to be transformed bit by bit, and it takes a lot of struggle and conflict, if the change is to be real. There are very many ideas that are disturbing at first especially to a person that has been brought up to believe and to take as a matter of fact that everything centers around me, and what I want, instead of us and what we need. I feel I have changed very greatly from a year ago at this time. I don't know if you would notice it, the difference, but I feel that there is one. It is very hard not to change, because everything around you is changing; and since you are in it, somehow you get changed too, whether you notice it at first or not. I feel that if I was talking to you I could say exactly what I feel, but in a letter it is hard. It sounds like a sort of muddled mess, but I hope you understand it anyway.

Well, to get away from all this ideological stuff, you may be interested to hear something more concrete about what I have been doing. Last December I entered the class for language students, and was in it until the end of June, after which I continued study of the language on my own until the beginning of this term. It is a very intensive course during which you study your Chinese at a rather terrific rate, and it is designed to get you out and into regular classes or on the job or whatever your plans are as soon as possible.

It is a tremendously interesting language, and lots of fun to study. Since my teacher speaks no English, I went home every week (that is to the Students Hotel where my parents were staying, which I call home) and prepared a whole week's lessons with my father over the weekend, which was a very satisfactory arrangement since his knowledge of both languages is extremely good; any progress I have had in learning it is due very largely to him. This term I entered a regular class, still in the same school. Due to my still relative lack of knowledge of Chinese, also my lack of necessary Physics

and Chemistry, requirements which I never took in the States except in grammar school (you don't have to) I find myself back in the 8th grade, a drop of exactly five years. Although it may sound preposterous, I don't mind it because school here and there is different. Much stiffer here, and my competition is much keener since everybody wants to go to school and there aren't enough schools to go around for the moment. . . . I am enjoying the opportunity to lay the foundation in Chinese and other subjects, so that I will have a larger chance of getting into college in the future, which is no easy matter. Also this way I have plenty of time to consider what I want to do in the future. There are plenty of kids in my age group too since I am not the only one who had to drop back five years. So for the moment this presents no problem at all. If I can manage not to be heaped under too much work, and pass, and not to be a nervous wreck in the process, then I will be satisfied; even though there is the drop of five years, school here is no picnic.

As I said before, there are not enough schools to go around, so do you think they are going to let any old dumbbell slip by you? We have nine subjects—history (Chinese), Geography, Current Events, (equivalent to politics), Chinese Language, Physics, Algebra, Geometry, Botany, Hygiene, and oh yes, Gym. The fact that I have studied some of them before is a help and lightens the burden some, for the difference in language is still very great. They have a very different approach to education, a much more thorough one. One big difference here that I notice about things is that they are done according to a plan which is centrally very well integrated, and things do not just happen any old way. As one of our teachers put it, "Social Science is called a science because there are rules to the development of society, and the Marxist approach to the study of society is to understand these rules and to act according to them." And this principle applies to everything here. It is based on objective reasoning, and not on subjective impulse, and that makes a tremendous difference.

Chinese people are about as different from Americans as I could imagine. They are patient, considerate and very gentle. As a matter of fact, in general they are virtuous, sometimes to such an extent that they make me feel uncomfortable because I am so brash and hot tempered and so very American. Not because they want to make me feel uncomfortable, because sometimes the differences are very noticeable, probably to me more than to any one else. Sometimes their virtuousness almost annoys me, since I miss somebody to be devilish with, but I guess people who have suffered as much as the Chinese have not had very much time or desire to be devilish. Anyway, this is a very minor thing and purely subjective on my part. One thing that is very nice about them is that they don't expect you to understand everything right away, they don't force you to do anything. They try to persuade you into understanding, but if you still don't understand, see and agree, they let it go, and wait until you are more ready for understanding. For understanding comes not only from books and learning, but also from experience, and sometimes after you have been here a little more time, certain things become clear and obvious to you and do not need to be explained any more. This has been a great help to me. Anyhow, the fact that they don't push anything down your throat gives you a nice feeling that they have enough faith in what they believe that in time you will come to understand it too. I have done a lot of reading, which has helped me thinking a lot. . . .

In a few days is the National Day celebration. If you are in an organization or school you can be in the parade, so I am going to be in it. I was in the May Day Parade too, which was very exhausting and I didn't see very much outside of Chairman Mao except clouds of dust in my eyes, but it was lots of fun anyway. In the evening there is dancing in front of the T'ien An Men too, Gate of Heavenly Peace, which is the center of the city, sort of.

Their Daily Life

from her American mother
Peking, March 3, 1954

We are all well and have weathered our first winter in this colder climate. The celebration of the Spring Festival (Old Chinese New Year—*Ed.*) was an occasion for visiting friends, both old and new, and how easily one makes new friends here!—F (her husband—*Ed.*) and I are still waiting for our job assignments. . . . The policy of the government is to give returned overseas people a chance to become adjusted to the new life and to re-orient their thinking. My progress is rather slow—especially when compared with J's (her daughter—*Ed.*) who gets a kick out of helping me. She has mastered well over 900 characters and is able to converse pretty well. She works hard of course and hopes to be able to go on with her regular studies before the end of the year. At the moment things are not always easy for her, but she is meeting the difficulties with courage and determination. Once she enters a regular school, life will assume a new meaning for her, as she will then be among students, imbued with the new cooperative spirit, which the freshly arrived children from Malaya, Indonesia, Japan, etc., have not yet acquired. The tasks here are many, the opportunities for service unlimited—and the willingness to serve universal. It will be good when our opportunity comes as we are ready to do our small share. In the meantime I am glad of this breathing spell which has given me a chance to rest up and get some health matters, such as teeth, etc. attended to. In this connection it is truly amazing as well as heartening to see medical care made available to *all*, and at a very low cost. All modern medicines are available, dental care is in the hands of skilled professionals, of which about half are women, think of it! The equipment is up-to-date and in the dental hospital where I am getting my teeth fixed there are several large rooms filled with dentists' chairs to take care of the many patients.

F Visits His Old Home

About two weeks ago F took a trip to his home town in Honan to settle some family matters and attend to his father's grave. He stayed ten days and came back full of enthusiasm, everywhere new buildings going up. His many old friends and neighbors who were delighted to see him told him of the complete transformation of their lives. They all support the new regime wholeheartedly. The houses formerly occupied by the missionaries have been taken over and put to better use, hospitals, schools etc. The "Street Government" of his town gave him all the assistance in settling his family affairs (his old cousin had died just before his return, leaving some debts, etc.). Upon his return we went to Bei Ta (formerly Yen-ching University) and visited a former schoolmate from Wisconsin, a psychologist, who took us over to the laboratory of a professor doing research on Pavlov's theories, who has set up a unique set of experimental equipment which impressed us. The campus is most beautiful. From there we went over to Tsing Hua, F's old alma mater. He was surprised to see many new additions. I found the whole place enchanting. . . . It must be beautiful in the spring with all the trees budding.

Life In Student Hostel

We are still in the hostel for returned overseas students. It probably seems strange to you that in a country feverishly building up in all spheres of life that everyone coming here is not immediately put to work. But this is precisely where the wisdom and farsightedness of this great people comes in, who have learned to plan their present and future life. Realizing that a prolonged stay abroad has put the returned students out of touch with the revolutionary changes in all aspects of life here, and also that they have acquired different standards of living, the government has set aside a special fund for the care and maintenance of such students and

families, while they learn the new living conditions and new ways of thinking. Usually there is a lapse of between 6 months to one year.

We are far from idle, although not yet working. For one thing, we are all engaged in intensive studies of socio-political problems. The women folk are assiduously studying the language with the help of the other students, and we are making progress. Also, our whole group shares the upkeep of our quarters and we are all learning the real meaning of collective living by doing many things together on a democratic basis—from the director to the students, to the kitchen staff and helpers. For us this is a necessary and salutary experience, and we are all growing in the process and feeling ourselves being transformed gradually. Besides our studies, our program to date has included frequent trips to historic sights, engineering projects, exhibitions, musicals, theater and movie entertainments, Sunday outings (in truck convoys) outside the city to visit some old Buddhist temple far away among the hills, etc. In this way we are becoming acquainted little by little with the various aspects of the new life here.

For the time being we prefer staying in the capital because our daughter's school is here. She lives there but comes home for weekends. For the present she needs our help and companionship. She is much liked here (at the hostel) and participates in our weekend activities. Besides, her father helps her with her studies, and this has greatly contributed to her progress. She is now able to speak, read and write the language pretty well, and mastered over 2,000 words, no mean accomplishment. She has a great deal of courage and spirit and is in the process of finding the real meaning of this entirely new life here. Young people of her age are as a rule idealistic and impatient, and she is learning, as we all are for that matter, that in this new country, with its new life, everybody has to pitch in to improve conditions and themselves in the process. This is not always easy, especially when you have been conditioned to another way of life. But she likes

it here very much, and realizes that her future is bright and assured.

As time goes on we find ourselves more and more part of the life here. The spirit of the people, their morality, good sense and their artless friendliness won us over from the very first day. It is a striking thing that although the country is feverishly building everywhere, and in all fields possible and imaginable—culturally as well as in the physical sense of the word—in order to catch up with lost time, and everyone participates with all they have and more, the atmosphere is joyous and serene, the people confident and happy.

Self Evaluation

*from her Chinese father
Peking, April 15, 1954*

Did I tell you that we were in the process of self-evaluation in my last letter? Everyone in the office must make a correct evaluation of him or herself. If one tells only about his or her good points (of course very few people do this) he or she will be criticised as being too conceited. On the other hand, if one dwells on his or her shortcomings, he or she will be criticised for being insincere. And if one only speaks about obvious things to “save face”, he or she will be criticised as being too superficial. In some cases one is asked to make reevaluation all over again, so as to be accepted by all coworkers in the office. On the surface, this process seems very exacting and severe. In the new social context here, where all men are brothers, this process of criticism and self-criticism is both helpful and necessary. It not only helps to improve the people individually but also our work in general. Now this whole process is over and we are looking forward to May Day and other important occasions, when we are going to contribute our best. From now on, since the number of foreign visitors will be on the increase, we shall be busier and busier until the latter part of October.

J's Progress In School

J is making rapid progress in school. She has recently been promoted to Junior high three, the last year in the Overseas Children's School. In the fall we hope she will enter a regular school. To be able to do so—to study all subjects in the Chinese language—means a great deal of hard work on her part.

His Work

*from her Chinese father
Peking, September, 1954*

We are getting along beautifully, as expected. I am now working at the Liaison Bureau of Cultural Relations for Foreign Countries, in Peking. It is very important work and I like it. It is our task to conduct cultural exchange with all foreign countries, not only to tell the outside world what we are doing in China but also to learn from them. Constant foreign delegations—cultural and otherwise—are coming to China. We try to take care of them while they are here, and introduce their art, music, dance, and other contributions to the Chinese public. Within the last couple of months we have had delegations from Indonesia, Romania, Bulgaria, Great Britain, Democratic Germany, etc. each bringing along his particular culture. Now our great festival, the National Day, October 1st, is approaching, and there will be more than a thousand foreign visitors in our midst. This is the fifth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic—a period which saw tremendous progress in every field.

Joy In Progress

The speed with which the country is progressing is really amazing. Of course China is still backward in many respects but every day new construction is being put up, new schools being opened, new roads being built, new industrial plans

set to work, etc. You have to see it before you can believe it. The liberation means released human energies, and with 600 million Chinese the energies released amount to a great deal. All over the country socialist construction is going ahead apace. The beautiful thing about it is that all the people get the benefit, not just a few millionaires. In fifteen or twenty years China will be a beautiful country, modern, industrialized, with socialism firmly established. It is a thrill to be able to participate in this creative era in China, literally the birth of a new nation.

Life In An Apartment

*from her American mother
Peking, September 21, 1954*

After F got his job we moved to the living quarters of the larger organization of which his bureau is a part. We have two big, large and airy rooms, with a community kitchen and bathrooms for the six families on our floor. (Common Chinese practice—*Ed.*) Across from us there are several buildings which are the living and working quarters of the Peking Song and Dance Ensemble. All day we hear the musicians practicing on their violins, pianos, flutes, vocal singing. This is a brand new development just outside the city, still in the process of construction, so that all around we see the frameworks for new buildings—a new rehearsal hall behind our house, some new dormitories, also ditches are being filled in, as this was formerly waste land, a new road for a busline has just been completed, practically stopping in front of our door, etc. But we see such sights all over the city which is practically bursting at the seams. Everywhere new buildings are going up and being completed in a surprisingly short time.

Moving here has meant quite a change for us. While we lived at the Reception Center we led an interesting and intensive life of studying, discussions, sightseeing, etc., but in a sense we were sheltered and everything was being done for

us. Here we are on our own and in direct contact with the people. We like it. The immediate result for me was that I became a housewife once more, and though I am not overly fond of housekeeping as a rule, this is proving a useful and interesting experience for me. At first I expected to feel lost, being the only "foreigner" in the house, with but a sketchy knowledge of the language. However, it wasn't more than a few days before I found that all my neighbors were anxious and ready to help me, in such a genuine spirit of cooperation that I was deeply moved—and soon I felt quite happy and at home among them. And when I was accepted as one of them and was given a share in the community work, in which all participate to maintain the common living rooms and hallway in good order, I knew I was really living in a new society where mutual helpfulness and cooperation are the way of life.

The house is full of kids. I have never seen so many children in my life as I have since coming here. They are so sweet, never aggressive though not inhibited, and remarkably well behaved. There is such a wonderful feeling for children here. They are lavished with love and care by all, and I think that accounts for their never being in the way, because they know they are wanted.

Second Winter

*from her American mother
Peking, January 10, 1955*

Things are going well with us. This second winter finds us better prepared to stand its rigors, as our bodies have become accustomed to the climate. Though it is very cold these days, we keep warm by wearing layers of clothing topped with padded pants and jackets, padded headwear and shoes. With no loss of body heat, we can comfortably enjoy the fine dry weather with the splendid sun shining all day long this time of the year. My only complaint is the eternal dust, blown in by the wind from the desert, for which this

city is famous. Added to the coal dust from the heating stove, it's the bane of the housewife's existence here. You may dust your rooms two, three times a day—by nightfall it's as if you had never dusted or swept at all. It's a losing battle, and the best thing is to accept it philosophically. They say, however, that when the young trees which have been planted, and are still being planted on the edge of the desert, will have grown into forests, in another 10 or 15 years, much of this evil will be eliminated.

Her Job

Since early November I have had a temporary job, at the Institute of Applied Physics, which will be over in a few weeks—transcribing the tape recorded lectures of a well-known British scientist who was here on tour recently. Once I start working regularly, I hope to resume my study of the language which was interrupted because my present work is pressing and time-consuming, and since I do not belong to any organization, I cannot plan my time and activities properly. As you know, a person's life here only becomes integrated once he or she is part of an organization.

J's Progress

J is in good health and spirits. Perhaps of the three of us her adjustment was the most difficult at first, requiring a more fundamental change both physically and emotionally—but she has come through with flying colors. We are proud of her.

The People

Speaking personally, the thing that for me constitutes a source of never-ending wonder and admiration is the stamina, industriousness, and healthy, cheerful spirit of the people. If occasionally certain aspects of our living conditions require

that I give my "conservative" body a little talking to—for when you have reached the fifties it tends to lag behind your thinking once in a while—this fact is more than offset by the realization that we are sharing these small discomforts with our neighbors and friends, and that for them this already represents a tremendous progress compared with their former way of living. Also, the sure knowledge that we *all together* are preparing a better life for the younger generation, the tangible results of which are growing before our eyes day by day, and most important of all, there is no longer any contradiction between our principles and beliefs and the aims of the society we live in, makes you humbly grateful for such a privilege. This, more than anything else, has meant a new lease on life for me.

Daily Life

*from her American mother
Peking, January 26, 1955*

You would like to have some idea of my daily life. I will try to describe it to you—though by the time you get this I may have a permanent position, with a different pattern of living, perhaps even a change of domicile. Anyway, for the present, this is my daily routine: We both get up around six, I send F on his way after preparing him a hot dirnk (he takes the rest of his breakfast in his organization). (His working hours are 8 to 5:30, with an hour and a half for lunch—six days a week. Because of the nature of my work, which is very tiring I have been given the privilege of making my own time, and I put in about five hours daily.) While my breakfast is heating I straighten up a bit. Until recently my little winter stove—which does for both heating and cooking—and I were not on the best of terms, but I have finally learned the secret of handling it. After fixing the fire so it won't go out—my friend and neighbor looks after it in the day time—I catch the bus right near our project. After a ten minute ride along the

ancient wall (800 years old), up to the tramway stop, just inside the city gate, I have another fifteen minute ride, then a twenty minute walk takes me to the institute of Applied Physics through various small hutungs (street lanes) which always fascinate me. The Institute is part of the Chinese Academy of Science where many young people are engaged in research—both men and women. Several of them speak English, more are studying Russian, but I have little to do with them as I am only a temporary worker, and am mostly alone in a big room by myself, with a lot of intriguing machines. There is a seventeen year old girl, a student worker, full of life and fun, who helps me with small things—brings me my lunch from the dining room (I don't eat with the staff), keeps me supplied with paper, etc. We manage to understand each other—when I am short of a word I point to it in my small dictionary, and we even carry on conversations on current events. On my way home I sometimes stop for vegetables, or fish, etc. spread out on open stalls outdoors, winter and summer, day in and day out. The cooperative, or the state stores, are cheaper than the private stores, and carry everything, from fruits, prepared meats, baked goods, teas, etc., to household furnishings, clothing, etc. They are always full of people, who are buying to their heart's content, so there is usually a big line in front of each counter. In his days, F says, he never saw such sights.

Our evenings are uneventful—we live outside the city, so we don't go out much in this cold weather. We do a lot of studying and reading, sometimes aloud. It may surprise you if I tell you that here I have easier access than in the States to the various fine papers and magazines published in New York, so that we know quite well what is going on, even if several weeks later. Of course, the current news we get through the daily press, of which I get a very good small edition in English. Once in a while F gets tickets to a show through his organization. We saw Open City the other day, which I had seen about ten years ago. Not long ago a real

treat—Eugen Onegin performed by the Stanislavsky group.

The Husband's Development

F is very busy and happy at his work. He has changed—he is gradually losing his former nervousness and restlessness, which were due to homesickness all these years, and is finding himself. He is very solicitous of the welfare of the two of us in the new conditions.

The Daughter's Development

J has grown still taller—she is the tallest student in her class, and they call her “the tall one”. She has lost weight also. Like most girls here, she is now wearing her hair in pigtails. She has never been so busy in her life. Besides carrying the heavy school schedule, of which I wrote you—and in which she is doing excellent scholastic work—she is now helping edit the school newspaper, is still one of the study group leaders in her class, and in addition has taken on a stagehand role in the dramatic group of the school. She is enjoying the latter activity, which also entitles her to tickets to theater shows once in a while. This past year she has made a tremendous effort to adjust to and accept the new school. There were various problems which I cannot go into here, the correction of which requires the combined efforts of students, teaching staff, and interested citizens. This year things are much improved. Her health is still causing me some concern, however, as she is going it too hard, and the change in climate, food and general living conditions have affected her. However, I hope that her good health foundation will stand her in good stead. She makes it a point of honor to toughen herself physically by rising very early, doing a lot of exercising to keep fit, and living frugally—at any rate not better than most of her school mates, many of whom do not have their parents here. When we bring her little

extras to supplement her diet, it is immediately distributed among her eight roommates, and lately she has requested that we do not bring her special things, in deference to her less fortunate friends whose parents are not here. Her level of understanding is progressing by leaps and bounds, and she is not the same girl. She has been thinking hard, and fighting hard with herself about many things, and has come through. As she expressed it in her letter—you cannot help changing here, because everything and everybody is changing around you all the time. I wish we could see more of her, but her school is so far away, and we are now both too busy to visit her in the daytime—during visiting hours. I am looking forward to spending some time with her on her vacation which is just starting.

Relationship to Others

The people who earn the most here are as a rule the foreigners, the various technical experts in engineering, science, language experts, etc. Also they are given the best living accommodations available. This is because in the case of outsiders who have come here to help, the government wants to spare them the hardships of the still backward living conditions to which its own people are accustomed. In my case I did not want to be treated as a special "guest", and although we have been given a few minor privileges which our neighbors do not have (such as having two rooms instead of one, although J is away at school most of the time) on the whole we share the same living conditions with the rest of them. I am glad of it, and would not have it otherwise, for only thus can you really come close to the people, understand them and their problems, and feel on an equal footing with them. However, the remuneration for my work is very generous in terms of average salaries. Some day I will write you about the relation between wages and cost of living—it is a little complex, and I must get more data to give you a comprehensive

picture. Another group of people financially better off are the capitalists, those who are contributing their share to the industrialization during this period of transition, and the ownership of whose enterprises they share with the state. Some of them occupy government posts. They know that later on, when their role will have been fulfilled, and the transition will have been accomplished, they will be absorbed usefully elsewhere in the society. There is an interesting story in this connection. It seems that once someone complained to the Big Chairman about the special privileges these people were enjoying. Why, he wanted to know, should they be treated better when they had done nothing for the big change, while those who had gone through countless hardships, suffered on the long march, etc., lived so much more frugally, earned less, were still deprived of many things which they felt their sacrifices had earned them. The Big Chairman replied: "Tungtze, (Comrade—*Ed.*) they are only the guests of the revolution. But we are the children of the revolution, and we do not expect any special treatment."

Rereading all of the above, I realize how inadequately it describes all the things I feel and think about my daily life contacts. One really needs the gifts of the poet and the prophet combined, but of a modern prophet, one who believes in and knows the full potentialities of science when applied to human progress, to construction, to life. A liberated people is the only instrument to realize those potentialities to the full—and what we are witnessing are just the beginnings of that realization. Life is not a paradise here—no one pretends that it is (perhaps only some utopian outsiders do)—and everybody recognizes the shortcomings which are criticized individually and collectively, and acted upon individually and collectively—not nearly fast enough for many people, but the momentum will keep increasing as time goes on because of the enthusiasms of the people, because of their tremendous moral strength, and because of their single minded desire to forge ahead. If it is available to you, I wish you could read Rewi Alley's "The

People Have Strength." As a poet and an engineer, he has caught the spirit of the people better than most recent writers, I think. In general they are gentle, modest and selfless, and so gay. At the same time they have a tremendous dignity and a quiet self-confidence as a people, based on a long history of survival and their present rebirth. This creates an atmosphere which for me is satisfying a life-long search in human relationships. I am also finding myself here.

*from her American mother
Peking, January 30, 1955*

*The Children, Their Play, Their Care
For Each Other, Nursery Schools, Etc.*

You would probably like to know something about the children and the young people here. How do they differ from children in the States, you will ask me. From my own observation, the main difference lies in their relations with each other, and with the adults. The upbringing of children always stressed respect for elders here, and that virtue has been retained. But while formerly the family always came first, and the society outside counted for very little, now children are taught to cooperate with each other, to be friendly with each other, from the time they are little tots in nursery school all the way up to higher education, and this reflects the new attitude toward human relationships among the adults.

Since I came here I have seldom seen children fighting—which is surprising considering the crowded quarters and the many, many children. On our floor there are about 10 kids, with two girls of school age—one 10 and the other 11. The rest are babies up to the age of 5 or 6. There are as yet no nursery schools for them, and they stay at home with their mothers. They have their share of mischief, of course, and the mother has to scold them once in a while. But if the little

brother falls down, the bigger sister, aged 6, immediately runs to him, picks him up and comforts him. Another one is just learning to walk, and his older brother, 5, is helping him stand upright, and watches him while mother is busy washing or cooking.

Being used to seeing American children with rooms full of toys, I was interested to see how these children here amuse themselves, and very thoroughly, with an almost complete absence of playthings. One little fellow was pulling a wooden brick by a long string up and down the hall for days, perfectly happy—and no one tried to take it away from him. The older girls have a game which looks like fun—it consists in picking up with both feet at the same time a small cotton bag filled with pebbles, and, by jumping, throwing it accurately in a square drawn with chalk on the cement floor. Another game, requiring some skill, is to bounce a small object made of chicken feathers tied together at one end with a flat, round velvet disk at the bottom—the bouncing is done with the back of the heel however, and the little girls are particularly agile at it.

On Saturday afternoons, when the two school girls come home earlier, they gather the whole gang at one end of the hall and teach them songs and the exercises and marches they have learned at school. There's nothing cuter than to see them all lined up, following the songs, and imitating the exercises. The older girls take a genuine interest in the small tots—there is no sense of seclusion or of superior disdain for the small fry. They all have a grand time, until the older girls are called to help with the supper or some other chore.

All the children, as soon as they are old enough—as early as five or six—get little household tasks to perform, and it is just taken for granted they will be done. Orders are immediately obeyed—no arguments. It's not that they are goody-goodies, but this is part of their early training, and the necessities of life here.

They are very natural and straightforward. Sometimes

I hear a pitter-patter of feet down the hall, our door is opened without ado, and there stands my little friend, the one who picks up her little brother. She wants to see what is going on in our room—for I am still a source of curiosity to the kids: I talk a different language, I look different, some of the things in our room intrigue them, like our record player and our View Master. This little girl especially likes the little cloth horse J made, so she picks him up, holds him in her arms and plays with him gently for a while, then quietly puts him back on J's bed, and leaves. Another time she will come in, she's not sure just for what, and start giggling. We then have a little chat, after which she usually is satisfied. If I offer a cookie or a piece of candy it takes a lot of persuasion to have her accept it—also a result of early training. Sometimes, however, the whole gang suddenly comes in clamoring for the horse (which has now been put away because of the dust this time of the year), or for the View Master pictures, which always fascinate them. Only once did they get mischievous, started teasing me, hid under the bed, and I had to put the whole lot of them out as I was busy. But on the whole they are very well behaved, and you just can't help loving them.

Street Scenes

I thought you might be interested in knowing what an ordinary street looks like here, with its traffic and activities. At the moment, because the country is not yet industrialized, private citizens do not own or drive automobiles. There are however many beautiful and well-kept cars, both American and Soviet made, for the use of officials and foreign guests and experts. Of course, we have good bus and street car service, and ever so many people have their own bicycles—just as do people in Europe.

In addition there are the pedicabs—sort of chairs on three wheels where you sit in the chair in the back and the

driver pedals you in front. Formerly they used to pull rickshaws, but the new government has prohibited this form of transportation as being inhuman, and a third front wheel was added converting the vehicle into a pedicab. The drivers are sturdy and colorful folk. Each owns his cab, which has a license number. You usually have to bargain for the fare, but as they have their union they will not drive you below a certain minimum amount. They can load a lot of stuff into their cabs—from a small stove to a table and several suitcases, with the passenger sitting precariously on top or underneath the load. These fellows have strong legs and strong constitutions. Usually, on my way to or from work, I pass a miniature children's house on wheels—or so it seems from the outside. Actually it is a sort of big wooden box, placed on a platform on top of the pedicab, with three small windows on each side, a small side door, two benches inside opposite each other, to accommodate about six tots being wheeled to and from nursery school or kindergarten by the pedicab driver. It's very ingenious, and cute as can be, for they're painted in gay bright colors, and you can hear the kids chirping inside like little sparrows.

Then there is the major form of transportation—the donkey or mule two wheeled carts, used for carrying coal, building materials of all kinds, etc. Usually they are drawn by a mule, with a small grey or brown donkey patiently trudging alongside. The drivers are marvelous—in winter with their sheep skins or long cotton padded coats, with a towel wound around their heads, in summer mostly bare-chested—they walk nonchalantly, whip in hand, spurring on their beasts. They are the salt of the earth.

You often also see chickens roaming in some streets, but as this is largely an agricultural country, and in some sections this ancient city has retained the appearance of a village, with its enclosed compounds and old style habitations, we got used to such sights.

Who Is Poor?

Poverty is a relative thing. We human beings are funny—if everyone around you is poor, you do not mind being poor with them—in fact its fun to share their living conditions. As a result, an interesting thing happens—you suddenly find that you have become very rich, because you have learned that contentment and happiness do not lie in material possessions, but in being together and working together for the same goal with your fellow beings who consider you as their friends, and give you their own sincere friendship.

*from her Chinese father
Peking, February 5, 1955*

Self-Grading

We are now in the midst of “self-grading” in our organization. The method is that everyone of us states his attitude toward his or her work, gives an evaluation of his own ability, and his good points and shortcomings. It is then discussed openly by the people of the whole office. People may praise you, or frankly tell you about your failings. Then you may present your own viewpoint. In this process of give and take, everyone finds his place in the organization and knows where and how to make further progress. It is like a kind of group analysis, in which all your coworkers are your true friends and advisers.

*from her Chinese father
Peking, June 5, 1955*

New Jobs For People When Old Disappear

In our organization, we are examining our whole set-up to see whether we can cut out “dead wood” and streamline our organization, to increase our efficiency and reduce administra-

tive expenditure so as to save money for the greater purpose of the country's industrialization. The people thus dismissed will not join the ranks of the unemployed. Instead, they will be sent wherever they are suited and needed the most. For instance, 60,000 agricultural producer's cooperatives have been recently established and the movement is spreading very rapidly. Each co-op needs a director, an accountant, and a technician, which means a lot of educated and trained cadres. There is a great lack of personnel in the rural districts. Again, the frontier regions and the national minority regions need great development—industrial, agricultural and cultural. So, instead of cadres being congested in Peking and a few other large cities, they are requested and encouraged to go there and settle down, and help build up the country. All the travelling expenses and other necessary financial assistance is furnished by the government. And the people in the rural districts and the frontier regions welcome them with open arms. One important factor is that the government never compels people to do so and so without first explaining to them the reasons why and consulting their own opinions. A process of thorough discussions is carried out until the people concerned really understand what, why and how. It is a very intelligent and considerate approach to problems and human beings.

The Five Year Plan

*from her American mother
Peking, July 24, 1955*

The five year plan, just submitted to the country by the National People's Congress (1952-1957) requires careful planning and budgeting so that everything is geared to heavy industries which must be built up first. With all the progress already achieved there is still much effort and sacrifice for many years ahead. It does not mean that anybody is deprived of necessities, in fact the people never lived so well as now, and things are improving daily. Nevertheless, first things

must come first and such things as universal vacations, hiring new personnel where not absolutely needed, etc., must all be subordinated to the basic plan of laying the industrial base of the country. At the moment everybody is urged to be economy-minded, not to waste the country's resources in electricity, goods, food, etc. and economy is encouraged as a public virtue. People are patriotically investing part of their earnings in government bonds. And no wonder! Just to read of the breathtaking plan to harness the Yellow River, the dream of the people for several thousand years, is enough to fire their imagination and make them want to contribute their share to such a wonderful project.

The longer we live here, the more keenly do we realize how fortunate we are to have come at this particular stage of the country's growth. The contact with this new morality, a united people's morality, has little by little changed us. We still have much to learn, it is a never ending process, but we feel we have shed much of our old ways of thinking and feeling, acquired in an individualistic society. For me, who in the past associated mostly with middle class intellectuals, this new society has brought a new understanding of what scientific socialism really means in terms of its application in the everyday life of the people. I am especially impressed with its power to transform the human character from a basically selfish one to the exact opposite, where the welfare of others is placed before your own. Not that we live in a perfect society, but what counts is that this is no longer an abstract ideal but one for which people are consciously and actively striving at home, at work, in government. Here the best way to show your love for your fellow-worker is to criticise him so that the point gets home. While the process is sometimes a painful one, the criticised emerges a better person afterwards, as he realizes it is really for his own good, so that he may keep in step in a society which is progressing day by day.

Nearby Nursery Schools

Right close by there are three nursery schools belonging to different organizations and our neighbors and myself love to watch the tots playing within their well-equipped playgrounds surrounded by bamboo fences and covered with woven grass mats to protect them from the sun. They are cute taking their exercises early morning with the teacher, or going out, hand in hand, in their little white aprons, for a walk down the street. The one across from our house has open rabbit cages, and some chicks and pigeons and baby ducks, which the children are taught to feed and take care of. They have also grown a lovely flower and vegetable garden, with the help of their teachers. So far this is only a beginning, as not enough of these schools can be set up yet. Therefore most people must still take care of their small children at home. However, the time will come when there will be enough schools for all. "Step by step," is one of the most frequently heard expressions in this transition period.

F's Group In a Special Study *from her American mother*
Peking, July 24, 1955

We have been well. F is busy at his work and finds it interesting and rewarding. They are engaged in a bit of special study at the moment, as are other organizations, of an important current problem which requires a common understanding for a proper solution. As you know, this is the way problems are solved here—by collective study first, and collective effort afterwards. In the process individuals and groups learn a great deal about themselves, each other, the society they live in and their place in it, and as a result the level of all is raised. It is a painstaking process, but it seems that nothing worth while is learned any other way.

J's Progress

J has just finished her final exams and is enjoying a well deserved rest with her friends at school. They are going to the park, out to the Summer Palace, for swimming, seeing plays and movies, before they all go home after learning the results of their examinations. (She passed them with high grades.—*Ed.*) She will spend the month of August with us and we look forward to having her home again. To skip a whole year, with ten subjects to study in a new language, has been no easy matter. She has certainly worked hard this past year and made remarkable progress. Even more remarkable has been her emotional and ideological adjustment. She is a completely changed girl. We are very happy about it, because she has had some tough hurdles to overcome.

Their Neighborhood

The settlement is swarming with people, and everywhere there are children, lovely children. When we came, a year ago, we felt we were out in the wilds, because the bus route had not been completed, and to get to town or come back it was necessary either to hire a pedicab or take a half hour hike through some rugged though picturesque small hutungs (residential streets—*Ed.*) which were rather impassable after a heavy rain. Getting our daily necessities was also somewhat of a problem then, with only one co-op housed in a few thatched roofed huts with dirt floors, to serve a rapidly growing community. When the queues were too long, and you were short of time, you were grateful for the private farmers bringing their produce in their pushcarts, etc., even though their prices were a bit higher than those at the co-op. There was also a temporary state-operated store, crudely set up under straw matting thrown over ordinary wooden posts, with roughly furnished boards for counters where you could buy cloth, thermos bottles, rubber shoes, toilet articles, baked goods, milk powder, and an amazing variety of other things.

Then one day, while taking a walk up the street, not having been there for some weeks, we were amazed to find the store had been moved into a lovely modern-looking brick building, proudly displaying children's dresses, fancy table cloths and pillow cases in their large plate-glass windows. When we passed through its doors we were surprised to see a neat, clean, well organized store with colorful tile floor, where you could now also buy radios, baby cribs, and all sorts of wearing apparel, in addition to the former merchandise. I still don't know when and how the place was built, although we live only five minutes walk away. But, without fanfare, that is the way things get done here.

Family Relationships

Speaking of families, relations between their members are extremely solid, from my observations. Though some survivals of feudalism can still be seen among the older generation—it takes time to change ancient cultural patterns—so far as the children are concerned their treatment and care is superb. They get a combination of strict discipline and warm love which gives them a good foundation for life. The busy mother will hand over the tiny infant to the six or seven year old sister (or brother) to carry and pacify, and while the young ones may get a bit of clumsy handling they don't seem to mind it because so much affection goes with it. Children thus learn their family responsibility toward younger sisters and brothers very early in life. This care for one another within the family is all taken for granted. Likewise, when father comes home from work he at once picks up the youngest and carries him around. On Sundays some fathers help with the cooking and cleaning. Grandmothers, even great grandmothers take over the upbringing of children when the mother works and do it with the same discipline tempered with love. And there is always a neighbor who will gladly watch another woman's baby, without ceremony on either

part, where necessary. And so, by living close to them, I am getting to know the natural goodness and wisdom of the people who have learned the art of living together and whose love for one another has been strengthened through their sufferings and common struggles.

F's Serenity

*from her American mother
Peking, November 1, 1955*

A few words about ourselves, to bring you up to date. So far as F is concerned, nothing much is new, except that he is extremely busy, like everybody with work and study. He is well and is gradually acquiring a serenity he did not have before. Even returned natives have to readjust to the new society, with its new basis and orientation, especially after an absence of more than twenty-five years. The meaning of the changes that have taken place must be studied not only intellectually, but even more in terms of one's own daily activities. Eventually this works a qualitative change in you—you can't escape it, because you become part of a society that is going toward a definite goal, and knows how to get there, and the conflicts between the individual and the society cease to exist because the interests of both are the same.

J's Progress

J entered regular high school this fall after having passed the entrance exams with high marks. She was happy to leave the School for Overseas whose students came mostly from Indonesia, Burma, Siam, Japan, etc., many from middle class backgrounds (small merchants' families mostly) and who had all kinds of adjustment problems, in spite of the fact that the majority came here on their own, out of sheer patriotism, against their parents' wishes, often at great sacrifice. In her

new school she feels that now at last she is living in the country and is part of it. She has a busy schedule, not only scholastically, with—I think—ten subjects, but also extra-curricularly. She is head of her dorm, a member of a couple of school committees, and is in charge of, or helping with a group teaching Pioneers something about Marionette Theater. She speaks, writes and reads the language fluently, though of course, she must continue studying it. She can read newspapers, novels, etc. One of her subjects is the Russian language, which is a sort of review for her at the moment, since she had three years of it before coming here, and can therefore help other students. She has made new friends. She has always had the ability to attract people because of her warmth and liveliness, and also she has qualities of leadership as she has a high sense of responsibility, discipline and organization. Her interests seem to lie more in the direction of the exact sciences, and she likes the open spaces. It won't surprise us if some day she decides to do something in the line of geological prospecting or in the field of agricultural sciences. Time will tell. The future lies bright before her.

The New Reservoir

A couple of weeks ago I went to see the Kwanting Reservoir, about a five hour train ride from here, in the company of old Papa who is now eighty years old. This was my first (railroad) trip outside the city since we came here and I was surprised how mountainous the region is. The mountains, bare of trees or vegetation, are rugged and are mute testimony of the devastation suffered over these many centuries, with war, poverty, etc. The train runs along the Yungting River, which like all other rivers, did not have a well defined course, and because of soil erosion due to forest denudations, etc., used to flood the northern parts of this city, as well as Tientsin. Yet on the way we saw very thin streams of water, some old river beds, because now the waters have been controlled at a strategic spot. One interesting feature is that to

get to the reservoir we had to traverse 63 tunnels. On a five hour trip that is a lot of tunnels. But more remarkable is the fact that this road has only been built in the last few years and each one of the tunnels along with it. Then you must take into account the lack of machinery for such undertakings, which means that most of the work is done by human labor and what simple machinery exists, but mostly human labor.

December 22, 1955

from her American mother

Commemoration Meeting for Walt Whitman and Cervantes

We are able to hear the Negro baritone, Aubrey Pankey in a program of songs, including the spirituals; he got an enthusiastic reception here as do all foreign guests. Later he spoke at a meeting in commemoration of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and Cervantes "Don Quixote." Though I could not attend, I read his speech and it was good. Every time one of these commemorative meetings is held, the major literary works of these world figures are translated and presented as a gift to the foreign members of the audience. In the last few years countless classics and world renowned works have been translated, and as the people's level of literacy and culture is constantly rising, more and more are coming to know the priceless heritage of mankind.

Raising the Basic Level of Literacy

However, first things must come first and the most important task being undertaken and vigorously pursued on an ever larger scale is first, raising the basic level of literacy of the workers and peasants, and, secondly, giving the national minorities a chance to read and write in their own languages, some of whom did not even have a unified script up to now. You remember how we spoke about the need for such a reform when we were with you. Then we thought this was a long way off, but everything moves so fast here that plans are constantly being revised and pushed ahead of schedule.

Conference on Antibodies

A conference on antibodies has just recently been concluded here, and it was attended by representatives from many countries who have made their knowledge and experience available to their brother scientists. I have had occasion to type part of the manuscripts in French, on the topic of virus diseases. It was very interesting to me as I was somewhat familiar with the subject matter. As a result of the conference big plans are being carried out for the large scale production of all sorts of antibodies not only in the field of medicine, but in allied fields too. We shall now be able to manufacture our own antibodies which had formerly to be imported from abroad.

Chinese Medicine Studied

Another development is that Chinese traditional medicine is now being given its due place as its value is increasingly recognized. Formerly there had been a tendency to look down on it as inferior to "Western" medicine, but in recent years research and practice have proven that it can effect cures where other more modern means have failed. Now a research academy of Chinese medicine has just been opened which will systematically study Chinese pharmaceutical and clinical experience through the cooperation of doctors of Chinese and Western medicine. It will also compile medical books, collect secret prescriptions and train teachers. In the past it was discriminated against by the corrupt government then in power.

Cultural Exhibits

*from her American Mother
Peking, November 25, 1955*

Now for general news. Culturally life gets fuller and richer all the time, and we try to take part in some of the events which succeed one another uninterruptedly. Certainly the people are given all the facilities to learn about their cul-

tural heritage and the present rate of progress, as well as future projects, and they are taking full advantage of it. Every place is always so crowded that it is hard sometimes to get in—like the river control project exhibit which we tried to see recently but had to give up after waiting in line for tickets twice on the same day. Instead we visited an exhibit on natural resources in one of the wings of the old imperial palace (now so beautifully renovated, where several exhibits are always going on at the same time.) It was very well planned and laid out, with samples of raw materials, illustrated and electrically operated maps in relief, exquisite hand made models of native products made from these raw materials, and big models of a coal mine and a steel center, also electrically operated by the guides, young men and women who explained the workings to streams of visitors. When you left you realized not only the country's great industrial potential, but that it would surely fulfill its plan of industrialization in the time planned and create a better life because it now possesses the greatest potential of all—the readiness of its people. It's not just their consciousness of ownership, but even more their full realization of their ability to transform the country because they are learning to transform themselves into human beings capable of cooperating for the common good. The latter process is, to me, even more exciting than the physical transformation of this country, thrilling though it is.

The Cave Murals and Sculptures

Last Sunday, together with Li's widow and family, we went to see the reproductions of the paintings, sculptures, etc. of the famous 1000 caves rediscovered a few years ago, and now being restored. I am sure you have read about these murals—they date from the 4th to the 16th centuries, and are magnificent. To give the visitors an idea a small brick structure has been built in the courtyard of the palace, and the interior is an exact replica, down to the last detail, of what

one of these caves looks like inside. The beauty and color of these ancient paintings is most impressive, and you are filled with admiration at the creativeness and skill of man from so far back, and you realize with a sense of poignancy the need for peace so that human civilization and progress may be preserved and extended to reach its full development.

New Department Store

Perhaps you have also read about the new four story department store on the big street almost opposite the lane leading to the hospital. I went to see it the day before the official opening—here such things are public events, to share the pride of accomplishment with all the people—and it was moving to see the beaming faces of the people as they went on their “tour of inspection.” Everything was spick and span, the store brightly lit, and the display of goods tastefully arranged—and such a variety of goods—knowing that it is run for the benefit of all the people whose standards of living are gradually rising so they can now afford to buy the needed articles of daily necessity, and even small luxuries—rather than a commercial enterprise run for the benefit of a few individuals—gives you a special sense of satisfaction.

*from an American woman
Shanghai, January 3, 1954*

Christmas Celebration

New Year was ushered in with many traditional activities and together with Christmas festivities has made this a gay holiday season.

Christmas, as you know, is not a national holiday and never has been in this country; yet international friends were given a day and a half “to celebrate according to your custom.” I spent the afternoon of December 24th browsing around in shops downtown. The highpoint of the afternoon came when

I stepped into the state store on Nanking Road, the former Ta Sun Company. The place was crowded with eager shoppers reminiscent of pre-Christmas rush at home. The food section was so popular that I postponed my own purchases, enjoying all the while the sight of satisfied customers buying candies, cookies, fruit, etc. As to the bicycle section—I didn't even try to walk through, the crowd was so dense. Nor did I try to use the escalator to go upstairs—passengers were queued up through several aisles waiting their turn to ride the "electric stairway." This was just an ordinary shopping day—crowds are much thicker over the weekends.

*from an American woman
Shanghai, October 3, 1954*

Tomorrow we go back to work after a glorious three-day holiday to celebrate National Day, October 1st, and the Fifth Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Doubtless your papers carried some of the news of the galaxy of foreign visitors who came to Peking for the occasion.

For us here in Shanghai the celebrations actually started on the eve of October 1st. The city has been gayly decorated and festooned with specially built pailos (decorative arches across streets—*Ed.*) Shops, schools, factories, cultural centers, theaters, etc., etc., have not stinted putting up decorative gateways, flags, slogans, lights, thus giving the whole city a festive, gala air. Particular interest, of course, centered around the People's Square (former Race Course) where the chief parades and demonstrations took place. A new wide road has been opened up in the People's Square, running from east to west thus enabling the paraders to march by the reviewing stand in impressive numbers. Not everything however focused in the People's Square. Parades and festivities were also held in each of Shanghai's 17 or 18 districts, so that the papers reported about a million took part in the demonstrations. Many people did not go to bed the night of Sep-

tember 30th for they strolled through the streets, singing, others dancing under the gay lights and fireworks. Nanking Road (One of Shanghai's main thoroughfares—*Ed.*) from as far west as Carter Road was closed to traffic all the way to the Bund, so that happy strollers and dancers could jubilate uninterruptedly. The pailou at the end of Nanking Road on the Bund was particularly impressive, a facsimile of the famous Peking pailous, for it marked the entrance to the new parkway, with willow trees and shrubbery, which has been built all along the waterfront from Soochow Creek to the old Customs Jetty. Then on the night of October 1st, factories, schools, organizations, etc., held their own celebrations.

The unrestrained gayety and happiness of the people surpassed New Year's Celebrations in Times Square on election nights! And well may the Chinese people celebrate for they have so much progress and so many achievements to rejoice over.

People's Congress

Truly the First National People's Congress last month in Peking marked an epoch-making milestone in China's history. The adoption of the Constitution and the election of the chief government personnel, as well as the opening and closing ceremonies were broadcast throughout the country, so that the people celebrated and rejoiced as each new significant step was taken. I have seen with my own eyes how intently and with what enthusiasm the people, adult citizens as well as youth, followed the developments at the Congress—an undeniable reflection of the sound democratic basis on which new China is built, and a clear manifestation of the sense of responsibility among rank and file citizens for the future of their country.

The 1954 Flood

Having mentioned the flood in the last two letters, I must add a few more comments drawn from the more complete

data which is now available. The many water conservation projects, dams, reservoirs, new large and long canals to carry off excess water, etc. which have been built in the last three or four years have been tested by the extraordinarily heavy rains of the summer and found to be sound and functioning successfully. They helped immeasurably to keep the flood damage at a minimum. Though large tracts of farmland were inundated and crops destroyed, nevertheless at the same time bumper crops were harvested in many other areas, so that the government is able to report that "agricultural output this year, while not fulfilling the planned output, nonetheless exceeds the 1953 level in grain and cotton. The estimated output for grain this year will be 150% and of cotton 280% of 1949." Meantime the flooded areas are being drained and crops resown as soon as possible, while areas not affected by the flood are producing more than their original estimates.

Ration Tickets

Recently we were issued ration tickets for cotton cloth bought by the yard, and I must say the ration allows far more than I ever use in one year—many Chinese friends have said the same. Ready made garments, ready made sheets, curtains, woolen and silk goods are not counted in the ration. So far there has been no hint of rationing grain.

These facts speak eloquently for the general well being of the people and the nation's ability to deal constructively with a major national calamity.

*from an American woman
Shanghai, September 18, 1955*

Acupuncture—Chinese Medicine

One day last week I had dinner with Cora (Executive Director of the Chinese YWCA—*Ed.*); she is undergoing a series of "needlings" given by a famous old-style Chinese doctor, which she describes as stimulating the essential nerve

centers which had grown lax in their real functions. Furthermore, the doctor is not treating her various aches and pains—arthritis, liver, intestines, etc.—separately, one by one, but is treating her nervous system as a whole (the old Chinese version of Pavlov's theory) with the result that she is again showing much of her old spark and pep. . . . This course of treatment though not yet completed is already bringing beneficial results. The recently awakened scientific interest in studying the old Chinese medicine is bringing together the best of both the old-style and the western-style medical practice and enriching medical science as a whole. Quite a few of my friends have been consulting old-style Chinese doctors with good results.

Simplification of Chinese Writing

I am sending you a booklet of the 798 Chinese characters which are gradually being introduced in publications representing the fundamental changes in writing which are now simplifying written Chinese. Page 8 shows how the first 57 characters which began to appear in newspapers last June (1955) are written; the second lot of 80 or more has been published and before long will also be used in the papers. Some years from now the final step of transcribing Chinese in spelling form will culminate the movement for popularizing the Chinese or Han language. Already there has long been a need for up-to-date dictionaries with modern terms and definitions, but now dictionaries will need to be rewritten with simplified characters too. Just one aspect of the transformation of the cultural life of the people! Many new doors are being opened!

October Celebrations

*from an American woman
Shanghai, October 6, 1955*

"Our October first week-end was a very happy occasion with much festivity and glorious fall weather. I viewed the

Whangpoo River pageant of boats at night from the 8th floor of the YWCA building with Cora and other friends. We had grandstand seats as it were from this height both for the boat pageant and the fireworks at the People's Square.

"Some 2000 guests from 50 or so countries were in Peking for the National Day (October 1st) and are now touring the country. I'm terribly interested that Jean Paul Sartre of France is among the visitors".

*from an American woman
Shanghai, December 6, 1955*

Journey from Peking to Shanghai

Just one week ago I returned from a captivating interlude in Peking—a happy combination of work and holiday. The trip was quick and easy in a warm comfortable train with excellent service. You would have rejoiced at the well-tilled fields all along the way, the warmly clad villagers and peasants everywhere, the tidy efficiently manned stations, numerous new railway extensions and bridges along the route, not to mention the many recently planted fruit trees in the countryside and young saplings along the right of way.

Peking itself was a joy, both for its ancient majestic beauty and its many new buildings, widened streets, orderly traffic, new busses from Czechoslovakia and countless other modernizing developments.

*from an English woman
Peking, September 14, 1955*

Rationing

It seems to me time that I devote a page or two to the rationing question and my personal experience of it.

First, it isn't really rationing; it is just what the government calls it—"planned purchase of grain, cotton, vegetables,

oils and to some extent meat also is restricted, but I'll deal with that later.

The reasons for it; roughly, are these: Six hundred million people, of whom 500 million are peasants, have in the past six years started living better than they ever did in their lives before. The number of formerly rich who are now living worse than they did is infinitesimal, a) because the stinking rich have all gone elsewhere, and b) because capitalists are still functioning and though perhaps they are not making the tremendous profits on the same scale as before, at least they don't live worse; they may just have to do without some heavy investment in a few extra diamonds, brooches or concubines. With the reconstruction of the war-devastated industry and the new construction that has begun, and with the enormous increase already made in production of consumer goods like food and clothing, wages have begun to rise; and with the giving of the land to the people who till it, albeit in small plots, the peasants have money for the first time in their lives. So they start to live better. So you see, the purchasing power has been rising rapidly and agricultural production can't rise as rapidly; first, because farming is a slow thing anyway, and second, because only large scale farming can make rapid change and peasants have got to take to large scale farming (which means pooling their newly-won land that they longed for all their lives and their fathers before them) in a slow voluntary way, and must not be hurried.

So, though agricultural production has been rising every year, despite the two floods of the years 1953 and 1954 (the latter being very serious) it hasn't risen as fast as the purchasing power of the people.

There is enough grain provided people don't hoard it. But a) there are still private merchants and the only way they ever knew of getting rich was by cornering something like grain and hanging on to it until there was a shortage, and b) people who never had enough in their lives and now suddenly have enough understandably try to hoard a bit for the

rainy day that even now, though they have their own government, they feel might come.

Agriculture is producing enough for every one to have about 660 pounds of grain a year and for the government to build up reserves in case there are floods or droughts in any region. And in the awful floods of 1954 nobody went without food and nobody died of starvation (whereas millions died in floods in the past—far more than ever died of drowning). But it is essential to keep stepping up the supply of grain because at the same time the country is starting out to industrialize, and the more you industrialize the more factory workers you need, and they will have to come from the peasantry which means they won't be growing grain; and the peasants who remain on the land will have to grow more; and they'll only be able to grow more if they get machinery (from the new industry); and China wants to import machinery too—which has to be paid for in agricultural products like tobacco and milk and tea; so that the land that goes over to those crops has to be compensated for by growing more grain elsewhere. It all seems rather complicated but it adds up to the fact that the backbone of China's industrialization is the alliance between the workers and the peasants, each providing the other with what he needs.

So there musn't be hoarding and there musn't be extravagance. Therefore, in the first place, the government endeavors to buy from the peasants all the grain they grow over and above their needs (this including seed grain as well as food reserves for rainy days); it doesn't compel them to sell their surplus or say that they must sell it to the government and not to private merchants. But it offers a good price and explains patiently and thoroughly to every one what it means. As for consumption, that brings me to the level of the dinner plate and the kitchen, which I will tell you from my own experience.

You see, I've taken part in the planning of grain consumption in my own trade union group here at work. It is still

going on. First, we all had long and detailed explanations of why grain distribution was important and why we mustn't waste any of it (for example, if 660 million people waste three grains of rice a day, we could buy—I don't remember, but an enormous quantity of machinery or chemical fertilizer, with the rice that is wasted—so don't waste a grain! don't take more on your plate than you need). Then every one was asked to keep a record for three consecutive months of the amount of grain consumed by the family and report details of the number in the family, their ages, etc. at the end of that time, through the trade union. For people who don't work in big offices or factories or aren't, for some reason, in a trade union, the neighborhood committee, of which there is one on every street, did the same thing. Then the amount of grain was counted up by the city government and became the rough estimate of Peking's requirements for every month. Then monthly ration cards were introduced on a good average basis; most people I know didn't take up all their ration.

Now, today, we got a new development. Our district is an "experimental" district for the further stage. People have been divided into broad categories—heavy workers, manual workers, sedentary workers, nonworkers, children and the aged; and each category has been given a range of from four to six quantities (24, 26, 28, 32, 34 catties per month) and every person is asked to place himself in the range he feels he needs for the next six months according to how many bowls of rice he eats, or thinks he needs, per day. All four of the people in the room I work in find the lowest category; but I know several who, to judge from the amount they get through the canteen every meal, will be higher than that. Three days hence all the figures will be given to the district government and they'll report to the municipal government and the latter will be able to adjust Peking's figures even more accurately than before. It includes bread, noodles, cakes, and everything, but of course rice is the big item to every Chinese person. (I eat one bowl of rice and four slices of bread a

day, but I make up on potatoes, which Chinese people don't care for so much).

So there you are: that's the rationing bogey brought out into the open. It's going on all over China. The Government knows exactly the basis on which it can plan and the people know just what they can get, and they helped to make the system they will get it under. Cotton (cloth) is roughly the same thing: you get a number of coupons according to your category (extra for weddings, births, funerals, etc.). That this did not cause a great hardship is shown by the fact that on September 30th, the day when this year's cloth coupons expired, the shops were simply stuffed with people spending their left-over coupons. Silk, wool, artificial silk, and linen textiles are not rationed at all. Meat is done by allocating to butchers, district by district. I haven't heard any one complain of not having enough meat. Chinese people don't eat a lot of meat anyway. I think you have to be a bit careful with cooking oil if you like a lot of fried food—otherwise no difficulty.

The first five year plan will be fulfilled; China will still be only a step on the road to being a modern, industrialized country. The peasants living standard will go up rather more sharply than the city-dwellers; levelling out the difference between them at an early stage when the big factories and steel mills and coal mines and oil fields get into production there will be machinery for all cooperative farms that will have been formed by then (one-third of all the peasants households at the end of this plan). But that's in the future, and they can still send production up a lot without machines, by cooperation and scientific agricultural methods and opening up virgin land and irrigation and so forth. The tranquility and confidence of everyone are catching. There's no impatience—people know where they are going.

Paris Fashions

Did I tell you that I got a letter from a French friend who

said that after the Chinese Opera had been at the Sara Bernhardt Theatre the fashion houses (haute couture) went all Chinese and Elizabeth Arden put out a new makeup called "pink mask" with rose coloured eyelids and black for the eyelashes and round the eyes, as in the conventional female makeup for the traditional Chinese opera. Mad, but shows that cultural relations are a Good Thing.

Shopping

*from an English woman
Peking, October 7, 1955*

Talking shopping, Peking has now got a big department store about the size of Selfridges. This is a big event. Shanghai, of course, being then a foreign occupied city, had them long ago. But Peking when I first came here in 1952 had only a couple of state shops and they were always so full of people that you could hardly get in them; they multiplied and subdivided and became many, but they were never large enough. So they've been building the big store for the last few months, and opened it a week before National Day. It is very exhilarating to go in. There are five floors and it is beautifully laid out, so that though there are many thousands of people inside, you don't seem crowded. I believe it will hold 20,000 at a time (but only three floors have been opened as yet) when it is finished. All the counters are glass show-cases with neon lights inside; and there is a tremendous range of goods including (please tell the people who believe that life in a New Democracy is drab and utilitarian) departments for perfumes and soaps, cosmetics, including things like nail varnish and dozens of kinds of vanishing and cold creams and combs and toothbrushes and toothpaste, etc., etc. There are wonderful hand-knitted woolies, acres of toys, two sections of "handicraft" items, baskets and lacquer-ware and carved ivory and embroideries and things from different parts of China, and musical instruments and sports goods and baby-

clothes and bed linens—indeed everything you can think of between a hairpin and a grand piano.

It is, as I said, really exhilarating because Peking is in general a very staid, dignified, beautiful but nineteenth century capital city; and even today with this big store, you would not need to walk ten minutes to find men making shoes by hand, stoves by hand, cloisonné enamel, fiddles, coffins and tables and chairs in little work shops, binding books or carving lacquers, and weaving baskets and tailoring suits in tiny shops with two sewing machines as England may have had 100 years ago. And now in the middle of all these is this store, three new and very modern theatres with cycloramas and central heating, a huge sports stadium, an open air theatre for 4000, and masses of new buildings for offices, and blocks of flats.

Architecture for the New Buildings

There was a tendency at first for architects and planners to be on the extravagant side, in a praise-worthy effort to make all the new buildings as stately and beautiful as the Temple of Heaven and the Imperial Palace, with colored tiles and painted beams and carved pillars, National style. But tremendously costly. After a while the Government put its foot down and said "It's all very well, boys, but first things first. What we need to spend money on right now is coal mines and oil wells and machinery plants, and the big roofs can wait. There were several critical articles in the press, and even a whole film exposing the costly way some of the buildings had been designed. Now the architects have been told to stick within well-defined limits, and if they like to design buildings that can have "top hats" in years to come, well and good, but meanwhile, make them pleasingly functional and less expensive.

I gather that if you want to put up a building like a block of offices, etc., you can choose from twelve or fifteen standard designs which have been made by the country's top archi-

pects. This will keep Peking looking dignified and architecturally homogeneous, and, I think, a good idea.

National Day Preparations and Celebrations

Last weekend was National Day, and we had three holidays. A nice feature of life in my trade union branch is the fact that before every holiday the trade union buys a lot of supplies like fruit, vegetables and meat (and cloth) at wholesale prices and sells them to the members. This has two effects—a) it comes cheaper than on the outside, and b) more important, it seems to me, avoids, for colleagues who are housekeeping, having to spend a long time shopping in the intense rush that proceeds a three day holiday everywhere. So the secretary of my small group (we are divided into small groups so that we can have real heart to heart discussions on trade union questions) popped his head in last Thursday and asked how much meat we wanted to buy the following day, how much fruit, etc., and whether anyone wanted a sum to tide him or her over till pay day which is the fifth of the month.

And then it was National Day. . . . Half a million people were in the demonstration. Four hundred thousand last year. And don't forget that instead of having to exhort people to come they actually have to limit the participation of each neighborhood, factory, school, etc., because everyone wants to be in on it. We got up at seven and went to Ted's organization for breakfast (after about 8:30 you can't get through the main roads leading to the Square unless you are in a car going to the review stand. At twenty to nine we got in the car with those of Ted's organization who were going to see, instead of take part in the demonstration. The former included a seventy year old seaman, now Chairman of the Seaman's Union, who was in the seaman's strike in Hongkong in 1919—one of the earliest trade union actions in the history of the Chinese trade union movement.

At ten precisely, the salute of guns went off, the enormous band played the National Anthem, Marshall Peng Teh-huai came out and reviewed the troops, and the parade began. The military part was short. Just enough crack troops of each branch (except, alas, the cavalry, which I was disappointed to find were not there on their charming little Mongolian steeds) to show that China can, and will defend, against all comers, the peaceful construction that was typified in the next part of the parade. The last tank rumbled away, there was a moment's pause, and then on came the children—I suppose about ten thousand of them, all in gay frocks and shirts, with flowers in their hands and balloons and doves which they released when they got in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace where Chairman Mao and the Government stood.

Then a long line of about eighty people, dressed in the different national costumes of the many national minorities that go to make up the Chinese people, carrying in the centre a huge national emblem with the big star and the five little ones.

And then the people—and more people and more people, smiling and laughing and cheering and shouting “Long Live Peace! Long Live Chairman Mao!” carrying flags of every color under the rainbow (silk flags) and huge, proud placards showing the progress this factory and that industry had made in the current year. There were bunches of flowers and streamers of ribbon; doves in the air, balloons with huge gauze streamers that floated down as they rose, saying “Long Live Peace”, flying over the top of the Heavenly Peace Gate—off they went into the sky until they were so tiny that they looked like “hundreds and thousands” on a birthday cake.

And all the while, more people: eighty abreast, here textile workers from the second big new textile factory near Peking in white aprons and white caps, carrying piles of sheets and bales of cloth; and there, students flourishing books, peasants with graphs showing how many more carrots and beans and

how much more wheat and beets you can grow per acre when you have cooperative farming; and model locomotives and power stations and oil wells; and portraits of the leaders of the other New Democracies; and more flowers and more flags and more smiling faces and cheering voices—like a sea, like a moving garden, like a river of joy and happiness.

This went on for three hours and more. You never noticed you were standing still all the while (nobody ever sits down as long as Chairman Mao is standing and he stands up all the way through) and by the end you were so exhausted with emotion that you could scarcely find another tear to shed—and then something happened that has not happened in previous years—the last of the people's groups passed across the Square, cheering wildly and trying to jump into the air and throw themselves at Chairman Mao to thank him for their new life. And then there came—

first a thousand dancers, in national minority dress, all dancing a slow stately dance to drums and music.

And then, twenty huge lorries with (terrific) tableaux from the Peking Opera, and new films and plays (with real actors themselves taking part, including Mei Lang-tang and Chou Hsin-fang, the top opera stars; and then, twenty pairs of "lions" with a white-satin clad lad dancing in front of each pair (I hope you have seen them in pictures and photographs because they are the most fascinating animals in the world) cavorting and prancing and opening their huge mouths and tossing their fantastic manes and tails—the poor "legs" of each lion can't have seen any of the enthusiasm they aroused at all. AND THEN . . . a whole sea of blue flags, about a thousand kids carrying blue flags high and waving them from side to side, and in the middle of this "sea" twenty enormous fifty-foot dragons (each carried on ten or more poles)—the carriers raised and lowered their poles so as to make the whole body of the dragon undulate and writhe and turn and roll in this blue sea.

Everyone on the reviewing stands went quite mad with

excitement; you wanted seven pair of eyes to watch it all go past, it was so colorful, so thrilling, so tremendous and beautiful and so Chinese.

After that there followed a whole Circus, with clowns and tumblers and acrobats and trick cyclists and bicycles twelve feet high and stunt motorcycles and jugglers, and the (wait) drummers all in unison with their red ribbons, and then finally the young athletes—ten times as many as they could muster in 1952, looking strong and robust and proud and trim with hundreds of flags in their hands, all in white shorts and coloured jerseys, boys and girls alike (It's so nice that everyone has black hair). This finished the parade, my dears, in a blaze of glory that will never be forgotten by any one who took part in it.

We went back to the Square again in the evening, joined the dancing throngs, oh'd and ah'd the fireworks and sang songs. More floodlights, more music, more people, more joy. You lie in bed at night and it goes past your eyes like a dream and you can't sleep for pride in a people who can do such wonderful things. And that was my fourth National Day.

from an English woman
Peking, October 20, 1955

Autumn In Peking

Chrysanthemums are coming back in the shops. I suppose there are more varieties in Peking than in any city in the world. The roast chestnuts I already told you about, and the old men are beginning to sell fried doughnuts between bread rolls in the early mornings—a nice hot greasy thing to eat on your way to work if you feel that way inclined. And very early kites are being flown by very small boys—they are just harbingers of the kite season. Nearly every one has gone into padded clothes already, there is a sudden onset of fatness in appearance and my belt goes out one hook to cover the long woolen pants I'm already wearing under my trousers.

Moving Into the New House

Today the paomu, which is literally a nurse, moved into the new house to get things ready. We gave her money to buy things like soap and brooms and she will settle in and wait for us to come on Monday. Not before because the head of Ted's department has invited us to go with him to the Western Hills on Sunday to see the autumn colors on the trees. The hotel won't seem the same without us. We've been here far longer than anyone. It is quiet again now at the hotel, incidentally, as the delegations who came here for National Day slip away, a few at a time.

Evening Entertainments

The backlog of National Day activities is not yet finished, and last week, besides hearing a concert by several Bulgarian singers and musicians, we went to the last performance of the Japanese Kabuki, a theatrical experience such as I have not had for ages. For sheer tremendous acting I haven't seen anything like it since Charles Laughton curdled my blood in *Measure for Measure* at the Old Vic. You know the more I stay here the more I realize what a tremendous thing Cultural Exchange means for breaking down barriers. You've only to think what the Japanese were doing here just ten years ago, and yet they are now exchanging their best opera companies and giving one another bouquets and welcoming one another's business men, parliament, Red Cross, artists and actors, women's groups and all, holding out the hand of peace and friendship and forgiveness.

Agricultural Producers Cooperatives

There has been an excellent harvest all round—the agricultural producers cooperative movement has taken a tremendous upward swing in the countryside so that Chairman Mao has had to make a big speech to the party and government

“cadres”, telling them not to be “stunned with success” but get on with consolidating the gains this means. Peasant income in some parts of China this year, I read in today’s paper, has gone up 33½%, and the article tells the supply cooperatives to send plenty of well chosen goods to the country co-op shops (plows and harrows and things as well as thermos bottles and torches and fancy teapots and nice printed cloth and plimsoles [rubber soled canvas shoes—*Ed.*] and colored towels and embroidered pillow cases and things like that) because the peasants will want to spend some of their gains.

*from an English woman
Peking, November 9, 1955*

The New House and Yung Tsai—the Maid

When I last wrote we were about to move into the house. We had to postpone it in the end because I fell down when running for a bus and could not walk for a while. Anyway we got into the house eleven days ago, and it’s heaven to be out of the hotel.

The house is Chinese style, built around a courtyard and facing south. One story. From west to east there are: a small study, a living room opening into the courtyard, with red pillars and painted eaves over two feet high, a balcony that runs the whole length, a large bedroom, a bathroom, and the small bedroom where the paomu sleeps. The paomu is the maid-servant and she is called Yung Tsai. Remember the name because you will hear more about her presently.

In the living room facing the door in classical modern-Chinese style are a large settee and two easy chairs, like a throne and two sub thrones, with a long table in front of them, with a teapot and teacups always at the ready. There is a book case, a dining table and chairs, a chest of drawers and a coat rack. The bedroom has two beds, my desk and a large wardrobe with a distorting mirror. There is also a mirror on both sides of the bathroom door. I think the house

must have belonged to a compradore, as there is an enormous electric fan in the ceiling for hot weather, a secret hiding hole under the bedroom and mirrors all over the bathroom.

Yung Tsai shows every day a new sign of being a treasure. We have to have a household worker as housekeeping under Peking conditions is next to impossible if you do a job as well. Shopping, cooking and transport are all difficult. She speaks to me loudly and carefully as if I were a child and perhaps **she herself** is not familiar with the Peking dialect as she comes from southern Anhui, so we both say things to each other carefully and slowly, and every time we have a satisfactory conversation about coal-balls or buying cooking oil or what to have for dinner tomorrow, she bursts into a loud excited giggle and trots out of the room. She is plump, pretty and peasantry, very short, wholesome looking and very efficient. I have only put one foot down wrong so far. The other night, when I thought she was in bed, I got out my new electric iron—which she is tremendously proud of being able to use because most women in Peking can't—and started to iron all my Marks and Spenser neck scarves, just to try it and because I have not had an iron in my hands for twelve months. Then she came into the room and there was a mild scene. Why are you doing that? Don't I iron well enough for you? She went to the drawer and got out the shirt she had ironed for me that day and said, "Isn't this all right?" It took my Chinese to the uttermost to explain that I only wanted to try it, that I was a laboring woman myself, that she irons wonderfully, everything was very satisfactory, etc., etc. You see she loses face if I touch a thing in the house. I hardly dare put my nose inside the kitchen which is round the corner from her bedroom. She makes wonderful meals, brings me bills for every penny she has spent, including a tiny bit of her tram tickets. (You have to give them up really to show you have not gone past the stage you paid for.) Tonight we had beansprouts, lotus root fritters, fish in sweet sour sauce, and a soup with egg and meat balls in it.

Yung Tsai has told the neighbors that I speak Chinese very well. I feel very happy because at last I can say a whole sentence without thinking of every word beforehand and have quite long conversations with her and others and get at least the gist of what they are saying. The other day I went into a shop to buy some drawing pins. I said, "Have you any drawing pins?" but unconsciously used my thumb on the table to show what I meant. So I did not really know if the man understood me. However, he said it was a wholesale shop and if I went to the state store across the street I could get them retail. I determined I would ask for them without using my thumb and the man said "drawing pins?" and pressed *his* thumb on the counter to show what he meant.

Canterbury Tales

The other day I kept Mr. Li waiting (the language teacher—*Ed.*) and when I got there he was reading a book out of the Trade Union Library that our Trade Union at work keeps in the room where I have my lunch hour lessons. He said, "This will interest you. It is the Kan Teh Pu Li Ku Shih (Wade spelling). I said, "Kan Teh Pu Li? ? ?", and he said "Yes, by the English author Chao-shu." Can you guess? *Canterbury Tales*.

Traffic Regulations

We are all familiarizing ourselves with the new traffic regulations because there are so many new cars and bicycles in Peking the traffic cops are not able to cope. One way streets and all sorts of things.

*from an American woman
Peking, December 22, 1955*

Speed of Cooperative Organization

We are glad that you and your friends enjoy our letters, though we are quite aware of their inadequacy in giving more

than a bare inkling of the tremendous things happening here. To tell the truth, even here, where we are in the midst of things, it is hard to keep abreast of events unless we continuously study, read a lot, and try to see at least a fraction of the never ending cultural events, exhibits, performances by some of the numerous foreign artists, etc., etc. going on all the time. The pace of progress hardly allows you to digest the daily developments, so rapid is the march forward.

At the present time the cooperative movement is sweeping the country and the enthusiasm for it is such that the peasants are ahead of their leaders who cannot keep up with them. The same sort of thing, though not on the same scale, is taking place among the small merchants, who are also getting organized into cooperatives. As for the bigger concerns, they are gradually becoming transformed into state-private enterprises with the active participation of the owners, both for reasons of patriotism and because they are finding out it is to their advantage.

J's Examination Successfully Passed

Our young lady is now in a regular senior high school after having passed her final examinations with high marks. She speaks, reads and writes the language fluently—in which she is studying her ten subjects. She is also busy with school activities and lives at the school, coming home weekends. She has matured considerably and is now quite well equipped to solve whatever problems she encounters. She has spunk, determination and high principles.

*from an English Woman
Peking, February 2, 1956*

Cooperatives Collectives State-Private Joint Enterprises

Since the beginning of the year things have been happening so fast and so excitingly that we've hardly known if we were on our heads or our heels.

What has happened is briefly this: from the middle of last year progress in the countryside has begun to go faster. I wrote you about this, and how the peasants were forming cooperative farms more quickly than expected and how some of the local government organizers and others had been rebuked by Chairman Mao for trying to hold them back, either from doctrinaire or from administrative reasons. Chairman Mao said that there was an upsurge coming, and boy oh boy, was he right! He had been down to the villages himself and talked to the peasants and the organizers and he knew that the idea that peasants who had just got the land for themselves would be unwilling to pool it in cooperatives for a long time was not so correct as it seemed. In fact, cooperatives, having proved to all the peasants to see that it worked—that is, brought bigger crops and more of them, was catching on in the countryside like wildfire.

What is more, cooperative farms had begun to turn into collectives. This was always spoken of last year as something for the quite distant future—for the end of the second Five Year Plan. (By cooperatives we mean that peasants keep their land but pool it for working purposes; by collectives we mean that they put their land into joint ownership and give it up to the collective—their animals and tools too). But where cooperatives had been going on for some time, they began turning collective faster and faster. (Actually in Hopei, the province in which Peking is situated, 80% have gone collective by now.)

Now we know that industry was going ahead faster than the Plan, because big state enterprises were already announcing that they would be completing their plans in 1956 instead of 1957. But there was a hell of a lot of industry that was still in the hands of private owners—the “national capitalists”, (distinguished from the “bureaucrat capitalists” who were themselves big government officials and made a racket out of a combination of business and government, and went to Taiwan with CKS, or to the U. S. or elsewhere with their

hangers-on.) The “national” capitalists were mainly patriots, who had always wanted China to be strong, hated American business intervention, dumping, and so on. They have been regarded as a sector to be treated very carefully and kindly because the state needed what they could produce and they were not against the revolution. So the idea was that they, like the farmers, would be led along the path to socialism very gradually. The first stage in their progress was that the state sold them raw materials and bought their finished products; the second was that the state would enter into partnership with them and they would get their share of the profits (about a quarter of the total) and then, a long time afterwards, when they had been slowly “bought out”—that is, had drawn as much as would buy their concerns outright,—they’d be taken over entirely and become state employees.

Well but, towards the end of the year and particularly at the beginning of January, it became apparent that there was an “upsurge” coming here too. What happened was, the existence of a private sector along with a state sector of industry was causing complications for the private sector. State industry could plan; it could get jobs done faster; it could get the raw materials better and quicker, and it was altogether more efficient. These were the objective circumstances; the subjective one was that the capitalists themselves did not like feeling like social pariahs. They found their wives did not like belonging to the capitalist class any more because the men who get in the papers nowadays are model workers; their kids hated the idea of ill-gotten riches and kept writing letters from their experimental farms in the northwest or their north-east new factories or mines saying DON’T send me any money or fur coats, and if you have any shares in the firm in my name, sell them, I don’t want to be a capitalist. And so on. I’ve oversimplified all; this is roughly what was happening.

So around the 4th of January there began to be an upsurge of Peking businessmen wanting to become state-private. I’d already told you about the reason for this. All the pharmacists

went over to join state-private, then the textile shops and so on. But beginning at this time, the retailers suddenly asked themselves, why not me? And within a week, or so, every single private businessman, industrialist and merchant in Peking applied to be taken over. There was one point at which they were applying at the rate of one a minute.

And then began the fun. As fast as their applications were legally ratified, which meant that in the course of time they would be taken over and continue to draw only a fixed interest on the capital they had in the firm, whether it was a shop or factory, and become salaried employees of the state, out they came into the street with their employees and began a procession all around the city rejoicing. You never in your life saw anything like it:

Every shop in every street hung out the banner "WELCOME JOINT STATE-PRIVATE OPERATION" and most of them stuck up the symbol *hsi* for married happiness too. So the streets were red from one end to the other. And up and down whatever time of the day you went, went processions with banners, the boss carrying one side and the trade union chairman on the other, and behind them all the employees letting off firecrackers, carrying silk flags and trade union banners, dancing the *yangko*; lion dancers, stilt dancers, people dressed as opera characters, cavorting round and clapping their hands. They went from one factory to another similar factory and congratulated each other. They went to the Trade Union offices and received the congratulations of the trade unions of their respective sections. They went to the municipal government and demonstrated their thanks to the Mayor and government of Peking. For days it went on.

There were two big organized demonstrations. One was in Chung Shan Park one evening, when 40,000 workers and bosses and their families celebrated for a whole evening with lanterns in the trees and dancing everywhere. And one on the Sunday when everyone converged on Tien An Men Square and the Mayor made a speech, and representatives from workers,

handicraftsmen (who had caught the fever and were forming themselves into cooperatives as fast as they could), peasants from outside who had gone collective, and businessmen brought up letters of congratulations to Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, and then everyone formed rings and danced and sang and did tumbling acts and so on.

In the middle of the week I went down a busy shopping street with one of the daily newspaper reporters. He was interviewing shopkeepers, and did not mind my going along as long as I kept out of the way and did not ask questions myself. We went to an old man who was 83 and had been in the same cap and hat shop for 40 years. He began right back at the Boxer Rebellion and told how his first shop had been burnt down and foreign troops and warlord troops used to come to his shop and help themselves and no redress; how the street's shopkeepers paid to have iron gates built across either end of the street to keep looters and thieves out, but he'd had more warlord trouble; then Japanese, etc. . . . "And now, he said, I feel safe!" His two sons are already out of the business working in cooperatives, and his grandson is studying for a surgeon. THEY won't have to worry about inheriting the shop.

Then there were two shoeshops, deadly rivals for years, that had become a part of a partnership of seven shoe shops that were going into joint state-private together. The assistants were discussing how to knock the wall down between the two shops. It was the same all along the street.

I KNOW you'll be unable to believe that capitalists all in a group like that should voluntarily liquidate themselves as such, and dance for joy when it is done. Naturally, some of the ones that got caught in the flood must have still had some doubts. But it's all been clearly explained to them in meeting after meeting: the biggest capitalists have gone over, why should the smaller ones be afraid? And now the people will benefit, for shops can be shifted to places where there are none of that kind (for example, the new housing estates) where

business will be tremendous. And none of these poor chaps will have to worry about their future any more: the state needs more shops than it's got. They'll all keep their jobs, in many instances in their own shops and factories.

Lest any of you think of the "little corner shops" you know, where the whole family is behind the counter day and night, where they never get out all together, and where profits (cigarettes, newspapers, etc.) get more and more difficult to make every year; the corner grocers' that have disappeared into Lipton's or some other kind of big chain grocer's maw; the ex-servicemen that started little electrical shops with their gratuities; the men who won a few hundreds in a pool and bought a greengrocery: think if they were offered a steady job, interest on the capital and stock at a fixed rate, and a future going along with everyone else to socialism instead of being social pariahs—if they really understood what it meant, would not they jump at it?

It was coming anyway, but we all thought it would take fifteen years. However, the capitalists themselves proved us wrong.

So you can imagine what all this has meant. ALL the plans have to be remade because everything was geared to a slower move forward in agriculture and the continued existence of unplannable private industry and commerce. Health, education, medicine, culture, science, and the big state construction jobs are all setting their sights higher and remodeling their plans to fit the new situation. All the targets of the first Five Year Plan will be smashed. There has never been anything like it in history.

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